



Testimony by Dr. Anna Wasescha, President
President, Middlesex Community College
Before the Higher Education Committee
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Good afternoon Senator Bye, Representative Willis, and members of the Higher Education Committee. I am Dr. Anna Wasescha, President of Middlesex Community College. I am here today with Steve Minkler, our academic dean, Jon Morris, chair of our science division, and Pam Frost, chair of our mathematics division. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today in support of the proposed bill Number 5618: *An Act Authorizing Bonds for Capital Projects at Middlesex Community College*.

Middlesex Community College is an overcrowded college. In a recent system-wide study of space, Middlesex was assessed as "extremely crowded" and, in fact, ranked as the most crowded of all the community colleges in Connecticut. Our classrooms are all uniformly small spaces that we fill so densely with students in desks that they remind me of the classrooms of my childhood during the height of the baby boom. We are working diligently at creative scheduling in order to accommodate more course sections, but at the end of the day, the fact is that the size and configuration of our facility is a major constraint.

Our full-time equivalent enrollment has grown 24% over the last six years. This semester, our youngest student is 12 and our oldest is 88. While we are the most crowded community college in Connecticut, we have received the least capital investment of all seventeen institutions in the newly formed Connecticut State Colleges and Universities. Not only have we had the least capital investment, but our buildings have accrued an \$11.2 million backlog in deferred maintenance.

The college that a majority of our students experience day to day takes place in classrooms, laboratories, and studios that were designed and built in 1973. Some of them have been updated and repurposed, but the size and utility of the instructional space has not changed in forty years. In addition, our college was built before we understood the importance of out-of-the-classroom spaces in promoting persistence

and graduation. These are areas such as study rooms, club offices, tutoring centers, math and reading labs, performance venues, and student lounges. We have very few of these amenities.

Our Meriden Center is located in a leased facility that previously operated as an office building. We have classrooms, a small learning center, and one room suitable for limited studio art classes and dry science courses. Twenty percent of our 2,793 students are taking courses in Meriden.

Of the four classic divisions of an undergraduate education, social sciences, natural sciences, humanities, and fine arts, Middlesex is most lacking in space that supports the fine arts. We have two art studios. There is no space to support vocal or instrumental music, theatre or performing arts. These arts programs are not only powerful ways to experience culture and heritage...they also help students learn how to collaborate with individuals different from themselves. Singing in a choir or producing a play is a categorically different learning experience from taking a course in literature or sociology. I see this as a significant gap in the education we are able to offer our students.

Ninety-five assignable square feet for every full-time equivalent student is the standard at Connecticut's community colleges. Based on our current enrollment, that would suggest we need a new building with approximately 70,000 square feet. Although we need to modernize our existing buildings and address the backlog of deferred maintenance, the need for a new space is more acute. An infusion of capital would be most welcome.

This month, we will be selecting a firm to produce a new master facilities plan for Middlesex. If the Senate and House of Representatives of the General Assembly pass Bill Number 5618, we will be able to get started on implementing our new plan in FY 14. Using the accepted square foot formula for a 70,000 square foot building, we would require an estimated \$4.8 million for design and preconstruction in accordance with state guidelines and \$46 million in construction funds.

Our students and our communities will benefit tremendously by having a college with the capacity to offer them a 21st Century education. This is what they need to be successful in the workforce, to transfer to baccalaureate degree granting institutions, to be contributing members of their community, and to be actively engaged in our democracy.

I thank you for your consideration of this funding request and for the opportunity to speak today. My colleagues and I would be happy to answer any questions you might have.